



# The New Social Realism of the Art of the Postmodern Era Viewed through Multi-perspective Glasses

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**ABSTRACT** As an outcome of using focus groups as my research environment to trial a non-linear, multi-layered *Framework for critical inquiry into artworks in a Postmodern era*, I found myself engaged in a rich canvas of metaphors. This canvas was framed by an ever changing, rather than fixed and constant frame like those we are so used to finding as the defining perimeter of two-dimensional artwork.

The artworks that provided the visual context for the participants' discourse in the trial, together with the rich data gathered from the focus groups have led me to consider Postmodernism as a state of mind that mirrors a period of transformation in social and critical thinking. It is not only artists who have been deconstructing society in a range of visual contexts but also the viewers, who seek to find expressions or reflections of their views within artworks.

The art of this new Social Realism questions and often fearlessly attacks conventions inviting us to challenge and debate issues. This requires teachers and students to engage in a dialogue that encourages introspection, shares perceptions, and helps them to see through the eyes of others, and in so doing to better comprehend the world.

In keeping with my research journey which to date holds the postmodern view that there are many voices with different perspectives on art and society that require one to be inclusive and flexible, are my own reflections on the first months of intensive library-based research. I was trying to use my first pair of glasses with multi-focal lenses. I found attempting to read book spines on the top shelf in the library, let alone the bottom shelf, to be quite a challenge to adjust to and adjustment changed my stance.

Art like most other school subjects, offers representations of reality (Harris, 2001). The art class however, offers a unique environment in this age of predominantly visual communication where the social construction of reality can be encountered within the context of the student's own art practice and through their critical discourse about artworks from their own and other countries.

In Victorian education, 2000 was the first year of a newly accredited VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education) Art Study design in which students are asked to discuss visual characteristics, meanings and messages in contemporary art. In Unit Four (usually undertaken in the final semester of year 12, the last year of secondary

school) a school can elect to study and respond to post-1970 artworks. This calls for an emphasis on the study of artworks that are products of postmodern rather than modern or pre-modern thinking. In response to this challenge I developed a possible curriculum framework for critical inquiry into artworks to help art educators facilitate students' deconstruction of artworks in this Postmodern era.

### **Framing a Postmodern Curriculum for Critical Inquiry into Artwork**

A clear vision of postmodern art education is at times like the view through a first pair of multifocal-lensed glasses maddeningly unclear or at the least enigmatic. "Doubts plague the undertaking. .... it can all too quickly become a hall of mirrors with doorways leading back to each other" (Siegesmund, 1999:1). On the other hand, recognition of the exclusiveness of many modernist tenets has seen postmodernism create new lenses through which we can question the mantra of art history.

It should be noted that many art educators continue to use a pedagogy that is largely grounded in the values and practices of modernism which is to be expected when their own art education was steeped in modernist conceptions of art. For example, most art teachers stress the aesthetic value of student creativity particularly their manipulation of formal elements in art practice. There are also art educators who perpetuate the pre-modern era by valuing the artist's capacity to represent objects and forms from the natural world with accuracy and skill.

Historical modernism, in Gablik's (1984) view, was committed to art without any social role, holding aesthetic values as ends in themselves. "Early modernists sought to preserve their view of truth by maintaining their distance from the social world, by staying pure" (Efland, 1992: 115). The art of late modernism held no meaning outside of the aesthetics of formalism and like the noted art critic and modernist, Clement Greenberg, artists believed that there was no social or spiritual purpose to art. According to Efland (1992), by the late 1970s modernity had gone out of style. This is ironic when we consider that the concept of style was a preoccupation of modernism and defined the many movements or "isms" of modern art as well as 'the self' as expressed in each individual artist's body of work. Modern art had become an historical entity like so many other period styles (Efland, 1992).

Like my fellow art educators I am charged with enabling my students to understand the way much of the artwork of the new Social Realism is positioning us ideologically in relation to the community of cultures that comprise the Postmodern era of globalisation. "We want to turn all our students into cultural critics" (Misson, nd: 2). The plurality of Postmodernism means that the art teacher is no longer expected to adhere to the discussion of art history as a progression of periods, schools, movements and styles. They are not expected to demonstrate a sense of reverence for the 'avant-garde' or for 'art for art's sake' and are not expected to measure creativity in terms of originality and individual difference. The critical eye of the art

student has been liberated from the constraints of the ideological boundaries set by the artwork when viewed through either modernist or pre-modernist eyes. John Howell White suggests that, “artworks may be considered holistic metaphors that embody emergent cultural beliefs” (White, 1998: 19).

### **Art Viewed through the Postmodern Frame – Metaphor as Catalyst**

A well chosen metaphor can be persuasive and help to constitute “realities, shaping our experience and our judgements about the nature of phenomena” (Taylor, 1984: 4). Metaphor as a figure of speech offers one of the ways to enhance or increase interest in ordinary descriptive language. Postmodernism’s frequent use of metaphor has seen it become a ubiquitous feature of our thinking and our discourse. A metaphor can form the catalyst for conceptual systems of thought and sensitise our perceptual understanding thereby helping us to interact with the world.

The metaphors used in this paper reflect the process of selection and emphasis undertaken in the research and subsequent design of a *Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern era*. In the words of Nelson Goodman, metaphor is more than ornament, “it participates fully in the progress of knowledge: in replacing some stale ‘natural’ kinds, with novel and illuminating categories, in contriving facts, in revising theory and in bringing us new worlds...” (Goodman, 1979: 175-6).

The metaphor can only illuminate a concept or percept when there is realisation of duality of meaning. According to Taylor (1984) language is a means of transference from one kind of reality to another, making language essentially metaphorical. Metaphors can create a relationship between the maker and appreciator of a metaphor but it is the latter that has to fill in the connections and interpret the meaning of the metaphor. The maker uses metaphor with the expectation of being understood by their intended audience. “Metaphor is part of a linguistic code that helps to create relevance and to constrain social identities” (Taylor, 1984: 17). Educational discourse is conducted in accordance with codes associated with others involved in educational activities. In art education discourse as well as within many of the artworks that form the context for discussion in the art classroom, metaphor has become a central feature of the production and reproduction of meaning. The intelligibility of metaphors depends upon one’s “familiarity with the ‘proper’, ‘central’, ‘real’ or ‘literal’ meaning of the terms involved” (Aspin, 1984: 25).

I have selected the metaphor of frames for two reasons. Firstly, visual art is the Arts form about which I am most passionate having been an artist and art educator for more than 30 years. A second reason I have selected the metaphor of frames is simply because of its power to delineate the artwork thereby focussing attention on the whole of an artwork and by using frames to crop details within the artwork the viewer can see particular parts of the whole. Cropping devices, lenses and mirrors have long been part of the artist’s everyday studio equipment. Eisner (1991)

eloquently argues the value of metaphor for conveying the ineffable, stating that, “nothing is more precise than the artistic use of language. Metaphoric precision is the central vehicle for revealing the qualitative aspects of life”(Eisner, 1991: 227).

A two-dimensional artwork may be contained within a frame or delineated by the zone of uncluttered or empty space provided by the wall. A three-dimensional artwork is defined by its position in relation to the empty space surrounding it, thereby framing it within its setting. The frame therefore defines the space occupied by an artwork be it in a gallery, museum, private home or on the pages in a book and the artwork communicates the artist's experience, beliefs and context. Art educators and art students are familiar with the kinds of meanings defined by the contexts described. If metaphor prompts us to think, see or imagine then its use in the proposed *Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern era* should offer a persuasive definition of the processes involved and precipitate disclosure.

The qualitative researcher constructs and frames an issue or question for inquiry.

The qualitative researcher is very much like an artist at various stages in the design process, in terms of situating and recontextualizing the research project within the shared experience of the researcher and the participants in the study (Janesick, 1994:210).

What framed my research was the issue of what are the most appropriate models for critical discourse about art in a senior art class in the Postmodern era. As my research evolved it became evident that there was a need to develop a model framework for critical inquiry into artwork that offers teachers and students a flexible multi-layered approach to suit our more Postmodern classroom contexts.

Once this framework reached a satisfactory draft stage it became necessary to observe students' critical inquiry into meaning(s) and how meaning is communicated in selected visual imagery using the proposed framework. It was also necessary to observe how students read artworks and write short and extended responses using the framework for critical inquiry (both of these types of response are required in the VCE Art Unit four Examination). I also aimed to ascertain if students develop skills over a period of time in reading artworks from multiple perspectives and what are the indicators of the skills that are identified. The viability of the proposed framework needed to be explored with art educators who comprise the other group of primary users of the framework for critical inquiry. An Art educators' focus group was convened to initially discuss expectations of a framework for critical inquiry to develop understanding of artwork(s) in a Postmodern classroom context. The second meeting of the group acted more like a reference group responding to the proposed framework post trialing with the student focus groups.

When all this trialing was complete the proposed *Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern era* was to be refined to a final draft stage. This would be guided by the teachers' evaluations of the draft framework along with information gathered during the students' application of the proposed curriculum framework in the focus group meetings.

### **An Overview of the Proposed *Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern Era***

The framework is still evolving but in its present form it involves a set of framed layers that can be used to frame the point(s) of view to be taken by, or frame the way the meaning(s) can be read by the viewer/student.

The framed layers include:

Interpretive frames -

Semiotic analysis

Formal analysis

Contextual analysis

Viewer perspective frames -

Interpretation from own aesthetic perspective

Interpretation from the artist's perspective

Interpretation from other's perspective (containing a broad range of subsets)

Influences frames -

These indicate the concepts, philosophies, social and/or cultural influences on the viewer's perspective

These framed layers work multiply and can be used in a range of sequences and various combinations. There will always be two or more frames in use at any one time. Please see Figure 1.

The Framework is designed to offer art teachers and students a choice of layers, each with a dominant concept forming a frame to filter the way in which the artwork is viewed. This layering gives the student a means by which multiple points of view and layers of meaning can be considered.

The concept of movable framed layers and filters that can change the appearance of text and image on the computer screen is understood by most users of computer technology in a learning environment. It is the students' familiarity with the layering and re-ordering of layers functions of the draw program in Windows and their use of more complex layering and filter functions of programs such as PhotoShop that adds to the accessibility of the proposed framework. The proposed ***Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern era*** thereby has a conceptual and visual

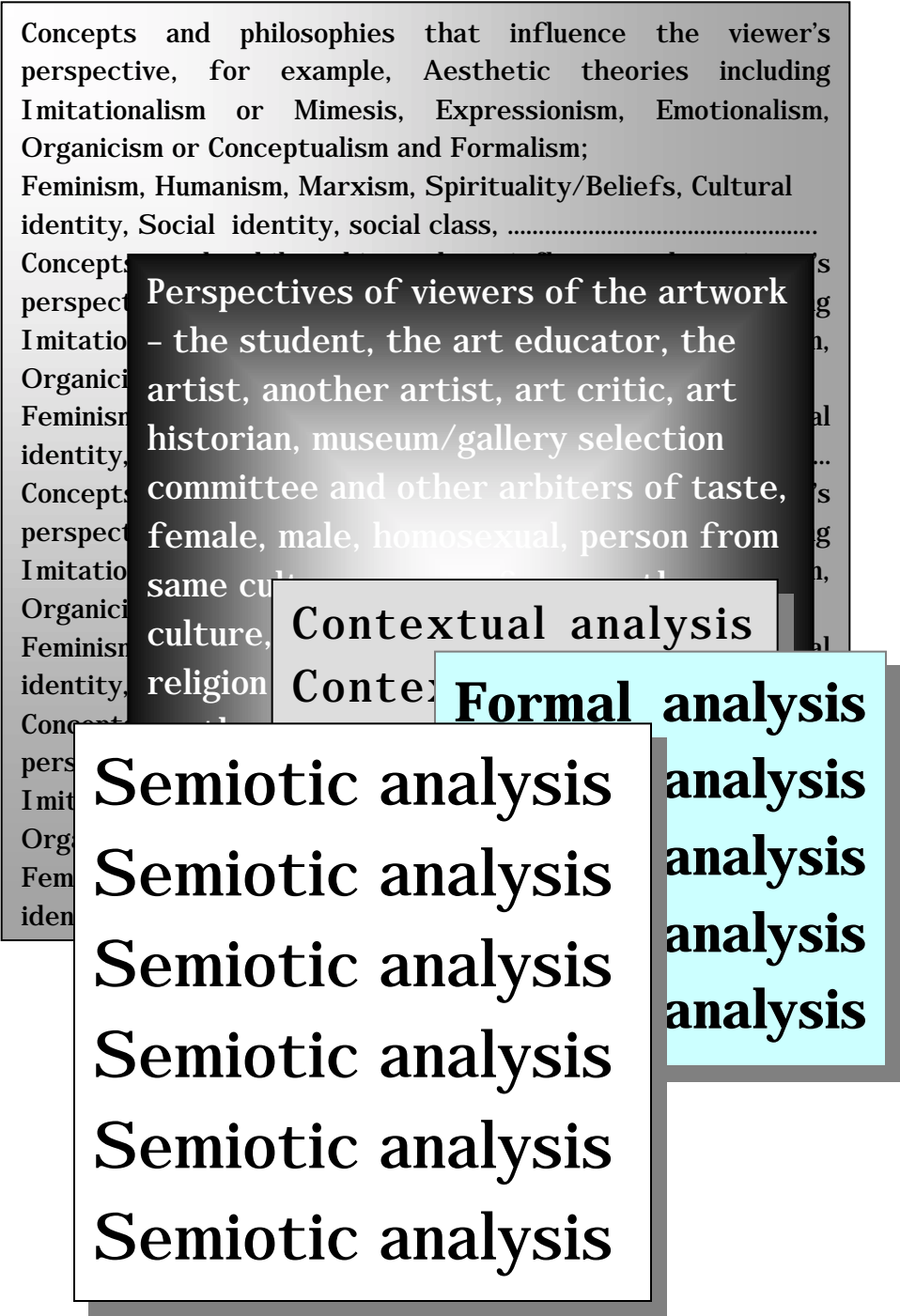
relationship to popular computer software, which makes it a construct that will be familiar to students and teachers at this time of ever increasing computer use.

The proposed ***Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern era*** can also be likened to putting on pairs of glasses with different tints in the lenses, or putting a different filter on the camera's lens. This kind of flexibility in a framework for analysis and interpretation of artwork through critical inquiry is better suited to the constantly evolving Postmodern view of curriculum as a state of continual growth. The term postmodern can be understood from multiple perspectives which reflects the global community's broader and more inclusive understanding of politics, art, science, theology, economics, culture and education.

In response to the pluralism of postmodernism the proposed framework will offer teachers a non-linear teaching methodology that encourages dialogue, self-reflection and understanding through interpretation with the kind of polyphony of voices comprising a discourse that in concert accepts and criticises, reconsiders, disagrees and challenges. In the modernist model for art criticism, aesthetics and contextual inquiry into art, discussion followed a more linear process. In this model for inquiry the artwork was firstly described, then it was analysed largely in terms of its formal arrangement, then it was interpreted and finally an evaluation or judgement was offered. The modernist model does not suit the kind of multi-layered interpretation required to meet the challenges of a postmodern classroom discourse that aims to acknowledge and celebrate otherness particularly from the perspective of social and cultural identity, race, gender and sexuality. The proposed ***Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern era*** can be used to engage students in deconstructing modern notions of aesthetics, truth, knowledge and power as represented in artworks and also engage students in analysis of meanings and how they are visually conveyed.



Figure 1. The proposed *Framework for critical inquiry into artworks in a Postmodern era*



Changing the point of view, by changing the layers, helps the student to view issues in the foreground of the image as well as those in the background. They can then discuss how the issues, their meaning(s), and the way the artist communicates ideas, converge or are synthesised in the image according to the viewer's perspective. The proposed **Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern era** is designed to be flexible and encourages the student to organise, construct and structure the way the proposed framework is applied in their critical inquiry into artworks. By recognising that there is no one right order the student is encouraged to choose the layering within the framework. For teachers this means that it is how well the student uses the analysis frames to explore the many connections between points of view, including the interplay and radical dissociation between viewer's perspectives, when reading an artwork that will become important in their assessment of the student's response.

The proposed framework has 'not thrown the baby out with the bath water' so to speak as it seeks to combine aspects of pre-modern thought with aspects of modern thought and develop a more inclusive process for critical inquiry into visual imagery in our Postmodern era. Engagement in critical inquiry with others recognises the postmodern regard for people as being interdependent rather than purely independent and where communal awareness and shared responsibilities rather than isolated interests are the preferred *modus operandi*. The students' aesthetic judgement should continue to evolve through exposure to a multiplicity of voices, and cultural and social perspectives. The proposed framework encourages the view that an artwork is re-created every time it is aesthetically experienced.

The proposed framework should enable students to develop knowledge through a non-linear multifaceted experience with an artwork. The student as a critical inquirer engages in a process that looks for the interplay of parts in an artwork as well as looking at the image as a whole.

### **Meeting the Need to Focus on the Proposed Framework in Action**

Focus groups offer researchers a useful tool for formative as well as developmental evaluation of an educational intervention. "Focus group interviews are most appropriate for questions related to research that is exploratory or explanatory in nature" (Vaughn, et al., 1996: 34). They can serve as a single, self-contained data gathering method or link to other data gathering tools. In schools the educator utilises group learning as a valuable context in which interpersonal and intrapersonal skills can be engaged in cooperative learning where ideas are shared, challenged, reflected upon, modified, redefined and expanded to include other perspectives. For the researcher a group of potential users of an educational program discussing their understanding of, experience with and reflective feedback on a program reflects the interactive nature of classroom discussion and provides an ideal context for 'learner



centred' course development. Williams and Katz (2002) argue that focus groups are "a useful way for promoting an empowering, action-oriented form of research in education" (Williams and Katz, 2001: 1).

The members of the student focus groups used in this project were not meant to be representative of all senior secondary art classes but were meant to reflect senior secondary VCE art classes in government and non-government school settings. Initially groups of male and female students were sought from government and non-government schools. As a researcher with experience in both of these school sectors it was important to have focus groups with members representing both government and non-government schools. Requesting involvement of students in the second semester of the year at a senior secondary VCE level was seen to be difficult by some of the invited schools' principals. The two schools that agreed to participate were both girls' schools representing the two sectors. Along with the art educators who will use the proposed framework these students represent the target audience of the proposed *Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern era*. Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub state that "group discussion distinguishes focus groups from other interview procedures" (Vaughn, et al., 1996: 1) making it important that the dynamic of the groups allow members to bounce ideas, views and perceptions off each other. This is a function of the focus group that is particularly advantageous to the trialing of education programs. To do this effectively, Reeve (2000) indicates that "the more similar the group is in terms of gender, age and social class, the easier it is for them to communicate effectively" (Reeve, 2000: 1).

A focus group is so named because everyone in the group has something in common and has been brought together to focus on a particular topic, program or product. Thereby focus groups offered me a user-based response to the proposed *Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Post-modern era* and valuable assistance in further development and subsequent refining of the pedagogical techniques and processes used in the framework's classroom delivery.

There were two Student focus groups totalling the twenty-one VCE Art students invited to participate in four meetings of two hours duration over four weeks in July and August of 2000. Students were also asked to complete written responses between meetings. The students were all involved in the development of their practical folios and were preparing for final examinations. They all agreed to be involved in the research and responded to all the tasks. Table 1 provides an overview of the general conduct of the focus group sessions.

**Table 1. Overview of the general conduct of the focus group sessions**

<b>The general conduct of the focus group sessions</b>	
1. Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Welcome</li> <li>b. Statement of the purpose of this session</li> <li>c. Guidelines to follow during the discussion</li> </ul>
2. Warm-up	Questions and/or reflective response exercises to set participants at ease and set the tone for this session
3. Clarification of Terms (to be written on whiteboard and/or given to participants)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Familiarise participants with/remind participants about the Curriculum framework's structure and purpose</li> <li>b. Provide definitions of the key terms to be used in this session</li> <li>c. Establish a common knowledge base of key terms through questions</li> </ul>
4. Enable participants (Student focus groups) to view the visual images and read any written information to be used in this session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ask general questions</li> <li>b. Ask more difficult questions</li> <li>c. Complete written response where required</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <p>Enable participants (Teacher focus group) to view research materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ask general questions</li> <li>b. Ask more specific questions</li> <li>c. Complete written response where required</li> </ul>
5. Member check - Transition to next session or Wrap-up of series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Identify and check with participants the major issues/themes that emerged in this session</li> <li>b. Determine how each participant perceives selected issues/themes</li> <li>c. Ask participants to review own written responses completed prior to/earlier in the session on sheet provided</li> <li>d. Clarify participants' preparation for the next session</li> </ul>
6. Closing Statements	

The students completed an exercise with an accompanying response sheet before the first meeting and an evaluation of the processes with which they had been involved at their final focus group meeting. They completed two short responses and one extended written task over the four weeks. The students viewed and discussed selected contemporary visual images representing the art forms of painting and photography. The images were selected to encourage consideration of issues related to race, gender and sexuality. All the artworks are or have been on public display at major galleries and although some of the works may be viewed as controversial, they are accepted as significant contemporary paintings and photographs. The VCE Art teachers were shown the works and asked about their suitability for the students.

Focus groups allowed me to moderate and observe interactions among my participants as they viewed the selected artworks, explored their own and others perspectives, and interacted with the proposed *Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern era*. The eight student focus group sessions enabled the frames with their accompanying pedagogical tools and techniques to be observed in action. Students responded to questions, discussed initial aesthetic perspectives, read and wrote about the artworks and reflected on the processes in which the program engaged them. These techniques allowed me to capture a richer interpretation of participants' perspectives on the *Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern era*.

The quality of individual responses when viewing the artwork from one or more of the perspectives, using one of the analysis frames or when layering one frame over another, was enhanced by the dynamic interaction about particular artworks during the focus group process. The artworks selected as the context for discourse when trialing the proposed framework were all post 1970, as required by the VCE Art Study design for Units 3 and 4, and portray a range of issues and social or cultural contexts (see Table 3.). They were selected because the artists who made them either hold individually unique perspectives on some of the key issues that feed the postmodern debate or reflect these issues perhaps unintentionally. Each artwork offers a visual context where a range of postmodern social and/or cultural issues can be examined to reveal things that students may not have noticed before. The selected artworks are not imitating reality they move beyond replicability or mimesis and present images that advance understanding, illuminate important qualities deepening comprehension of social realities. Table 2 provides a summary of issues identified in the selected artworks that were used during the focus group sessions.

**Table 2.**

The range of issues identified in the selected artworks
<p><b>Issues include those related to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• power - marginalisation and exclusion;</li> <li>• gender roles - feminism, exploitation and marginalisation;</li> <li>• sexuality and sexual preference - the right to choose and marginalisation;</li> <li>• race - identity, marginalisation, rights and reconciliation;</li> <li>• the questioning of what were believed to be 'universal truths' and the 'truth' of history;</li> <li>• the interest in personal narrative verses meta-narrative - how we construct our sense of self and define our personal aesthetic;</li> <li>• spirituality in the face of globalisation - beliefs, connections between contexts and values;</li> <li>• the speed of change in particular the "Genome Project" - cloning and genetic-manipulation; and,</li> <li>• issues related to the dissemination of knowledge and ownership of knowledge.</li> </ul>

**Table 3. The artworks selected to represent a new Social Realism**

The artists and artworks
<p><b>Diane Arbus:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A young man and his pregnant wife in Washington Square Park, N.Y.C.</i></li> <li>• <i>Russian midget friends living in a living room on 100<sup>th</sup> Street, N.Y.C.</i></li> <li>• <i>Untitled (2). Untitled (5). Untitled (6).</i> (1970-1971).</li> <li>• <i>Child with Toy Hand Grenade in Central Park, New York City.</i> (1971).</li> <li>• <i>A flower girl at a wedding, Conn.</i> (1984).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stephen Bush:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>When I'm Here I Wish I Was There.</i> (1994).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Donigan Cumming:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>April 27, 1991.</i> (1991).</li> </ul>

<b>Judy Dater:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ms. Cling-Free.</i> (1982).</li> </ul>
<b>Juan Da Villa:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sentimental History of Australia.</i> (1982).</li> <li>• <i>Stupid as a painter.</i> (1981).</li> </ul>
<b>Russell Drysdale:</b> Note this artist and artwork serves as an example of an influence on Moffatt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Back verandah.</i> (1942).</li> </ul>
<b>Leah King-Smith:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Untitled (No. 10),</i> from the series '<i>Patterns of Connection</i>'. (1991).</li> </ul>
<b>Robert Mapplethorpe:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Thomas and Dovanna.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Duane Michaels:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Return of the Prodigal son.</i> (1982).</li> </ul>
<b>Tracey Moffatt:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Something More 1.</i> (1989).</li> </ul>
<b>Patricia Piccini:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Psychotourism.</i> (1996).</li> <li>• <i>Protein Lattice – red.</i> (1997)</li> <li>• <i>Protein Lattice – red.</i> (1999). Republic Tower, Melbourne, 1999, Visible Art Foundation, Billboard Project.</li> </ul>
<b>Julian Schnabel:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Untitled.</i> (1989).</li> </ul>
<b>Sally Smart:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mad House History Painting 1.</i> (1989).</li> </ul>
<b>Starn Twins:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Die Jungen Frauen.</i> (1990-1993).</li> </ul>
<b>Peter Tyndall:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/someone looks at something.</i> (detail), (1979).</li> </ul>

The juxtaposition of the artworks and the issues that liberally pepper the discourse of the Postmodern era provided grist for deep reflection and at times intense debate.

### **We Are All Striving to Come to Terms with the Implications of our Postmodern Times**

In art education, critical and contextual (historical/cultural/social) discourse about art is connected to aesthetic inquiry. In aesthetic inquiry students examine what is said about art in various forms of talk about art. These forms of talk include commentaries and reviews in the media, by art historians, by the artist and or their associates, by fellow students and teachers. Aesthetic inquiry is an activity they frequently engage in about their own arts practice when they talk about meanings and evaluate their processes and completed artworks in their Visual diary. This is part of the requirements of VCE Art in Victorian Art Education.

Aesthetic inquiry could be defined as ‘talk about the talk about art’. In the postmodern multicultural world the many and varied voices call for “increasing acknowledgment of the numerous social forces that motivate, direct, influence, and define art and that within various cultures, may be used to evaluate artists and their work” (Chalmers 1999: 1).

At this early stage in the analysis of the data gathered in the focus groups, it is too early to confirm that aesthetic inquiry using the proposed framework, expands cognition through exposure to various perspectives, thereby evolving understanding with each viewing of an artwork. The aesthetic experience keeps the viewer connected to visual arts works and for the student artist it fertilises and regenerates their personal aesthetic. “Postmodernism helps us understand our challenge as art educators as attempting to assist our students integrate their initial aesthetic experience into a summative cognitive experience” (Siegesmund, 1999:2).

I commenced my research and subsequent design of a *Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern era* from the stance of a modernist trained art educator holding a eurocentric view of art. My own artwork owes much to the classicism found in several artworks by various artists that punctuate the history of Western art. I have long been unable to remove myself from the belief that the rebirth of classicism found in the High Renaissance was “Harmony Attained” as E. H. Gombrich (1966) so eloquently described it in his book *The Story of Art*. This was the major textbook in senior secondary art education in Victoria from 1951-1991 (Hirsh, 1996). I have changed my stance and enjoy the challenges of postmodernism. It is hoped that engaging with the ways other’s perceive an artwork using the proposed *Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern era* will assist students to see artworks



through other's eyes and thereby perhaps change their stance to a view from a more inclusive platform.

The eminent art historian E. H. Gombrich in chapter twenty of *The Story of Art* explored the concept of art as "The Mirror of Nature" ( Gombrich, 1966: 309-342). Paul Duncum an Australian authority in Art Education added another layer to this when he wrote:

Art opens doors; equally it establishes the door-frame. Art mirrors but only what is selected in the mirror (Duncum, 1991: 52).

Perhaps we should add, 'what the viewer sees mirrored in an artwork is subject to his or her own reflection'.

Metaphor prompts us to think, visualise, interpret or imagine and its use in this paper aimed to 'arrest' readers' attention and hopefully precipitate an understanding of the proposed *Framework for Critical Inquiry into Art in a Postmodern era*.

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